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DEPT FOR DRL, INL, EUR/SCE
NSC FOR BRAUN
USUN FOR DREW SCHUFLETOWSKI
DEPT FOR H - PLEASE PASS TO OFFICES OF SENATOR VOINOVICH
AND SENATOR DODD

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR MARCH 24 VISIT OF CODEL VOINOVICH

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED, PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Kosovo has a new, stronger government, and is starting to get serious about the compromises needed to ensure that status negotiations result in the independence they so desire. The Kosovo Albanian negotiating team has made a well-received proposal on decentralization, but needs to go further in advance of the next round of status negotiations scheduled for March 17 in Vienna. Kosovo's moderate Serb political coalition led by Oliver Ivanovic keeps talking about rejoining the government, but remains reluctant to do so without Belgrade's acquiescence. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) Kosovo has strengthened its democratic credentials by ensuring a peaceful political transition after the death of President Ibrahim Rugova on January 21. Constitutional lawyer Fatmir Sejdiu was sworn in as the new President of Kosovo on February 10. Under pressure from the governing coalition of the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) and the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK), Prime Minister Bajram Kosumi resigned on March 1, and was replaced by former Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC) Commander Agim Ceku on March 10. Controversial Assembly President Nexhat Daci resigned on March 9, and was replaced by Kole Berisha on March 10. Berisha, a member of Kosovo's Catholic community, is a respected and low-key veteran of the LDK.

3. (SBU) While Belgrade opposed the selection of Ceku as Prime Minister based on his history as a wartime commander in Croatia and Kosovo and his subsequent indictment in Serbia on war crimes charges, those credentials are exactly what most observers believe will allow Ceku to make strong concessions to Kosovo Serbs without being questioned by Kosovo war veterans and other hard line nationalists. In his acceptance speech, Ceku addressed Kosovo Serbs in Serbian, a rare occurrence here, telling them that there is a place for them in Kosovo society and institutions. He urged them to fight for their rights together with all other citizens of Kosovo

by taking part in government institutions and by participating in everyday life in Kosovo.

¶4. (SBU) The change in government, combined with the recent creation of the new ministries of justice and interior, created the possibility of further changes in the cabinet and created new high level positions. After much speculation, Ceku decided to keep all ministers for now, saying that he will evaluate their work over the next several months. In his acceptance speech, Ceku promised concrete results in the implementation of standards. The "Six Plus" coalition of Prizren-based Bosniak and Turkish parties (also part of the LDK/AAK coalition) successfully lobbied to have a Turk installed as deputy justice minister; and Dejan Jankovic, a high ranking Kosovo Serb from the Kosovo Police Service (KPS), injured in a shooting incident in September 2005, has been offered the position of deputy minister of internal affairs.

¶5. (SBU) Despite overtures from Ceku, moderate Kosovo Serb politicians from the Serb List for Kosovo and Metohija (SLKM) caucus continue to boycott the government. SLKM members never took up the eight set-aside seats they have held since the 2004 election, but keep their options open by participating in assembly committees. SLKM leader Oliver Ivanovic talks more and more frequently about returning to the assembly, but pressure from Belgrade combined with a perceived lack of effectiveness during their initial participation in the Provisional Institutions of Self Government (PISG) in 2001 keeps them away.

¶6. (SBU) The only Kosovo Serbs who actively participate in the PISG are Returns Minister Slavisa Petkovic and his two MP's from the Serb Democratic Party (SDS). Petkovic is widely reviled by other Kosovo Serb leaders, who consider him

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a traitor for participating in the government; and by Kosovo Serbs and Albanians alike who consider him corrupt and ineffective. In February his party split into three factions, two of which are now urging Ceku and UNMIK to replace him as Returns Minister. However, the SRSG Soren Jessen-Peterson is reported to support Petkovic to stay on as minister, at least until more representative Kosovo Serbs are willing to take part.

¶7. (SBU) The first round of status negotiations took place in Vienna on the topic of decentralization on February 20/21. Under pressure from the Contact Group to make a generous offer to Kosovo Serbs, the Kosovo negotiating team has adopted a front-loaded proposal on decentralization. The next meeting takes place in Vienna on March 17. Meanwhile, the Kosovo negotiating team will reflect its new membership with PM Ceku and Assembly President Berisha replacing Bajram Kosumi and Nexhat Daci. (NOTE. The negotiating team was established by President Rugova last September with the President as chairman and with the PM, Assembly President and two opposition leaders as members. Newspaper publisher and veteran activist Blerim Shala is the coordinator of the team's work. END NOTE.) Non-Serb minority representative and health minister Sadik Idrizi participated in the first round, and the non-Serb minorities expect that they will continue to be included in these and future talks, particularly on the issues of decentralization, property rights and cultural heritage.

¶8. (U) COMMENT. Kosovo Serb leaders should be reminded that it is in their own interest to participate in the government. Kosovo Albanians should be congratulated on their initial proposal on decentralization, but also urged to go farther. The key now is for the new leaders to create political space for the negotiations by engaging in outreach and confidence building measures to the Kosovo Serbs, particularly in resolving property claims, solving outstanding inter-ethnic criminal cases and implementing decentralization. In short, Kosovo Albanians need to reach out to Serbs now, and show

them that there is a future for them in Kosovo. END COMMENT.

19. (U) Post clears this message in its entirety for release
to Special Envoy Ahtisaari.
GOLDBERG